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**TEACHERS AS LEARNERS AND PRACTITIONERS:  
SHIFTING TEACHING PRACTICE THROUGH HAVRUTA PEDAGOGY**

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EDUCATION

[T]he main thing I learned.....is the havruta experience, the thinking process of two people together with an idea, a text...how really the process of learning from each other really happens. And not only experiencing it but also reflecting on the experience and understanding the dynamics between two people...And the second thing is experiencing the learning as a learner...It wasn't a very technical thing that I took...from the havruta learning to the classroom. [It was] more of a set of tools to help me understand my teaching...

These words come from a Jewish supplementary school teacher reflecting on her experience in a year-long professional development (pd) program at her school, centered on havruta learning, a form of Jewish text study in which two people work together to closely read and interpret texts in a meaningful and engaging way. The PD was organized around havruta learning frameworks that guided teachers in both their learning and teaching, opened them up to new learning possibilities for themselves and their students and gave them tools for making concrete changes in their classrooms.<sup>1</sup>

This article presents case studies of two teachers who experienced this particular form of PD that situated teachers as learners in the structures and content that they were trying to teach in their classrooms, while also helping them analyze their experience and implement their learning in their own classrooms.<sup>2</sup> In the pages that follow, we describe the professional development program, both the rationale for its design and an overview of the theory of havruta learning on which it rests. We present a brief overview of the impact of this intervention on all of the school's teachers. We then zoom in on the cases of two teachers whose experiences in the intervention illustrate the ways in which the same professional development experience can be successfully appropriated by two very different teachers to help them address salient teaching issues and thereby help us better understand

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<sup>1</sup> This preprint is published as: Kent, Orit and Allison Cook (Forthcoming, 2014). Teachers as Learners and Practitioners: Shifting Teaching Practice Through Havruta Pedagogy. *Journal of Religious Education*.

<sup>2</sup> We would like to thank Sharon Feiman-Nemser, Susan Fendrick and Meir Lakein for their comments on earlier drafts of this article; the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education at Brandeis University for its support of this research; and the teachers at Gesher for opening their doors and sharing their time and their classrooms with us.

some of the possibilities that the pedagogy of havruta learning can afford religious educators.<sup>3</sup>

## CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

The year-long PD program took place at Gesher, an innovative supplementary school<sup>4</sup> in which ongoing teacher development related to content and pedagogy is seen as a priority. The Jewish studies curriculum at Gesher draws substantially on classical and modern Jewish texts, making havruta learning an attractive model for enhancing the overarching curricular goal of creating meaningful text study experiences for students.

The intervention was set up as a design experiment (Cobb, Confrey, Lehrer, and Schauble 2003)<sup>5</sup> intended to “test out” and document how teachers might learn and experience a particular theory of havruta pedagogy and apply it to their classrooms. It builds on a model of six paired havruta learning practices developed by Kent (2008, 2010), in previous research. It also builds on related work on the uses of havruta in pre- and in-service teacher education. (Feiman-Nemser 2006, Holzer 2006, Kent 2006, Raider-Roth and Holzer 2009) The current study focuses on how in-service teachers learn from their immersive professional development experience based on a theory of havruta learning and its corollary practices, and how they translate this learning into their classrooms.<sup>6</sup> It presents findings through two case studies (Stakes, 1994, 1995) that highlight the particulars of two

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<sup>3</sup> This research is approved by the University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) and followed standard protocols to protect human subjects.

<sup>4</sup> Jewish supplementary or afternoon schools are private programs that typically meet in the afternoon and/or weekend and supplement students' general education with a range of Jewish subjects, as well as social opportunities.

<sup>5</sup> “Design experiments,” they explain, “entail both 'engineering' particular forms of learning and systematically studying those forms of learning within the context defined by the means of supporting them.” Design experiments are explicitly used to explore the “complexity that is a hallmark of educational settings.” (Cobb, et al, 9)

<sup>6</sup> For the broader conceptual outcomes of this design research, see Kent and Cook, “*Havruta Inspired Pedagogy: Fostering An Ecology of Learning for Closely Studying Texts with Others.*” *Journal of Jewish Education* 78:3., 2012.

teachers' learning and teaching processes and their connections. It is by getting inside these details that we can begin to understand how and why teachers translated this pd experience into their classroom practice.

In order to understand the details of these processes, we collected two kinds of data: data about the professional development intervention and teachers' learning in it and data about what teachers did in their classrooms so we could learn how they are connected. We collected and transcribed videotapes and/or audiotapes of all ten pd sessions, as well as workshop planning notes, materials and our own reflections. We also collected materials from mini-units in two classrooms: audiotapes of lesson planning sessions, classroom videotapes, teachers' lesson plans, teacher reflections on the lessons, and written student work. We collected observational notes in select classrooms, regularly solicited and recorded the principal's observations of teachers, and collected four sets of written reflections from teachers throughout the year about concepts and tools with which they experimented in their classrooms. Finally, we conducted a mid-year self-assessment and year-end interviews with all faculty.<sup>7</sup>

Our research draws on sociocultural theories of learning which posit that learning is socially situated and constructed (Lave and Wenger 1991; Lave 1993; Rogoff 1990, 1996). Lave and Wenger (1991) write, "Conceiving of learning in terms of participation focuses attention on ways in which it is an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations." (49-50) We immersed and inducted the Geshur teachers into a faculty learning community (e.g. Little 2002, 2003, 2007) guided by us, in which they engaged in "increasing participation" (ibid) as both learners and teachers of text, being asked to take on increasing responsibility in both of these roles, trying out new ideas and exploring challenges. We hypothesized that through their increasing and changing participation as both learners and teachers, there would be shifts in their learning and teaching, each impacting the other.

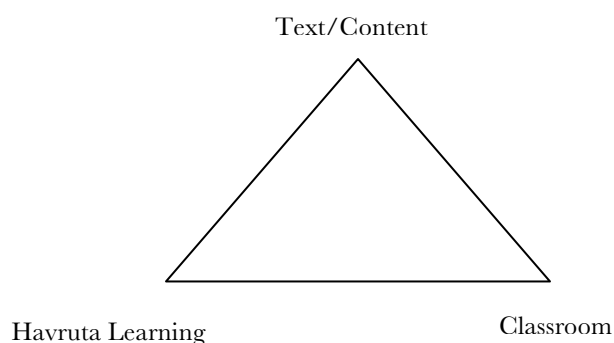
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<sup>7</sup> The authors reviewed and analyzed all data in order to corroborate their interpretations.

## THE GESHER BEIT MIDRASH FOR TEACHERS: A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

We created the "Geshher Beit Midrash for Teachers," (GBMT)<sup>8</sup> a monthly study group for the entire Geshher faculty. Teachers studied -in havruta and as a large group - Jewish texts relevant to their curriculum and explored and experienced the dynamic practices of havruta learning, learning havruta text study skills and working through increasingly complex issues of teaching practice. We also provided targeted coaching<sup>9</sup> to two teachers (whose case we showcase here) to help them translate ideas into teaching.

At our first GBMT meeting, we presented the teachers with an organizing frame (Diagram 1) for how our multidimensional work together would proceed.



*Diagram 1: Organizing Frame*

The “Text/Content” dimension refers to the text learning we did in havruta as adult learners engaging with rabbinic and biblical texts. We chose the specific texts either because they came directly from Geshher’s curriculum or because the text’s content reflected the very pedagogical issues we were exploring in practice.

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<sup>8</sup> Beit midrash literally means "study house" and is a place where people study Jewish texts together. In this context, we designed a beit midrash to meet the interests and needs of in-service teachers. The idea of designing a beit midrash for teachers draws from Sharon Feiman-Nemser, Elie Holzer and Orit Kent's collaboration in designing a beit midrash for preservice teachers.

<sup>9</sup> Our approach to co-planning followed what Sharon Feiman-Nemser and Catherine Beasley call, “mentoring as assisted performance.” (1997)

The “Classroom” dimension included explicit exercises to support teachers in moving content and pedagogical ideas from the GBMT sessions into their classrooms as well as reflective discussions about teachers’ work in their own classrooms. The pedagogic work under examination encompassed teachers’ planning process as well as the patterns and experiences of their own real time teaching.

The “Havruta Learning” dimension refers to the particular theory of havruta-concepts, frameworks, and tools -we introduced and practiced in the GBMT through mini-lessons, demonstrations, structured exercises, and reflection.

The GBMT PD syllabus proceeded according to the interacting building blocks of Kent’s theory of havruta learning, which proposes three pairs of core havruta practices that work together in dynamic relationship: listening and articulating; wondering and focusing; and, supporting and challenging.

These practices operate in relationship to another important conceptual framework that we shared with GBMT participants, “The Three Partners of Havruta” (Kent 2008 and Raider-Roth and Holzer, 2009). This framework promotes an important teaching and learning stance: that havruta learning happens through the interrelationship among people and a text and that the text is a partner too, with its own subjectivity, integrity and voice. We drew on both of these frameworks in the GBMT as a way to practice and explore the elements of meaningful text-based discussion and collaborative work not only for use in havruta dyads, but for teaching and learning more broadly.

Throughout GBMT sessions, as teachers participated in their own text study through a variety of exercises targeting specific havruta practices, they reflected on their own styles, strengths and challenges as havruta partners and took on different roles in havruta as learners with colleagues (“listener,” “articulator,” “supporter,” “challenger”) and as classroom teachers in the same categories. They presented their colleagues’ interpretations as well as their own through writing, drawing, and oral presentation; participated in a havruta fish bowl exercise; learned a typology of questions and generated and classified different types of text study questions; watched and analyzed video of adults and children

participating in havruta; and, engaged in what was often lively havruta study and full group discussion of texts and the multiple interpretations that people brought to the surface.<sup>10</sup>

After each PD session, teachers re-entered their classrooms with assignments to translate their learning from the GBMT to their work. Teachers were asked to observe relevant phenomena in their classrooms. For example, they had to reflect on how they “listened and articulated” when teaching and the ways in which their particular use of these practices affected student learning. Teachers were also asked to try out new teaching moves- for example, to choose a question to practice during text study in their classrooms, and reflect on its effects on the discussion and on particular students. As we moved further into the year, assignments became more involved. We asked teachers to add elements to their lesson planning, provide their rationale for their plans, and reflect on what occurred in their classrooms. Teachers shared their teaching reflections, along with classroom artifacts and video, with the entire faculty in the GBMT, who together studied the "text" of videos and transcripts from lessons in which teachers used havruta in different ways and conducted full class text discussions.

The experience of the GBMT included: learning with a havruta partner; learning as part of a full staff professional learning community; being coached by the group leaders; having overarching frameworks for guiding and reflecting on the experience as both a learner and teacher; and, experimenting in the classroom and reflecting on those experiments with colleagues. These components served to create a web of support for these teachers to make important changes in their classrooms. The changes included:<sup>11</sup>

- Teachers in all grades made direct engagement with primary Jewish texts a central part of classroom work.

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<sup>10</sup> These activities enabled the teachers to engage in three important features of professional learning identified by Grossman and her colleagues (2009): representations, decomposition and approximations of practice.

<sup>11</sup> These are based on teacher’s own reports, both shared in the group and in written reflections, feedback from the Gesher director, our own observations, as well as other unsolicited communication.

- Teachers in four out of five classrooms introduced students to intentionally-designed havruta study.<sup>12</sup>
- Teachers in all grades drew on havruta practices such as listening and wondering in designing lessons, responding to student comments, and general classroom facilitation.
- Teachers spent more time listening to their students think out loud and getting to know them as individual and group learners.
- Some teachers found themselves more trusting of their students to be able to do hard work with original sources.

Teachers also reported that the experience of the GBMT and what they learned in it significantly deepened their relationships to their colleagues and to Jewish texts.

While these general findings are important, they only tell part of the story. The list of findings does not explain how teachers went from experiencing the pd to actually implementing parts of it in their classrooms and how teachers appropriated different aspects of the same pd to address their own unique teaching challenges.<sup>13</sup> To explain this part of the story, we need to look at how individual teachers made sense of and adapted the pd. We therefore will share two teaching cases- one of a beginning teacher and one of a more experienced teacher -in order to provide rich portraits of how these two different kinds of teachers adapted the pd in their own teaching and the impact that had for their students.<sup>14</sup> Adam's case shows how a beginning teacher drew on the pd to shift classroom control from being based solely with the teacher to being shared with the students; Diane's case shows how a more experienced teacher also benefited from the pd, which gave her

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<sup>12</sup> Every classroom except K-1. The K-1 teachers didn't believe that their students were ready to work independently and instead incorporated aspects of havruta into their full group learning experiences.

<sup>13</sup> For example, the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers drew on the pd to address classroom management issues that stood in the way of meaningful discussions with their students, and the 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher used the pd to restructure the kinds of questions she used, thereby deepening the full class discussions that were at the heart of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum.

<sup>14</sup> As Stakes (1995, 8) explains, "The real business of case study is particularization...we take a particular case and come to know it well..."



language and tools to identify and actualize her goal of developing interpretive space for her students, space in which her students could take time to dwell on the text, wonder about it, and get to know it through exploring its different meanings.

## ADAM'S<sup>15</sup> CASE: LEARNING TO SHARE CONTROL THROUGH HAVRUTA PEDAGOGY

### *Starting Place*

Adam described himself as a “gut teacher”. With no professional teacher training or prior teaching experience, he relied largely on his personal instinct, charisma, and the strength of his relationships with students. The Gesher director described Adam as a teacher “with a lot of soul; not a lot of structure.” The mix of Adam’s reliance on his own charisma and his lack of structure combined to create a teacher-centered classroom. All discussion happened through Adam: he shared his ideas about texts; he called on students with raised hands to respond to his ideas; and, he then commented on students’ responses.

### *Motivation for Change and Experience in the GBMT*

Adam was deeply affected by his experience in the GBMT studying with his havruta partner, Laura. He was surprised and delighted by the fact that his study partner had such different ideas from his own about the meaning of the texts they were studying together. Early on in the GBMT, he began to note the ways in which his own learning expanded through hearing and working with the ideas of his peers. Focusing on the havruta practices of listening and articulating, Adam made it his mission for every student in his class to articulate their ideas, since his experience in the GBMT had shown him that without participation from each individual, learning would be lost.

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<sup>15</sup> The teachers’ names are pseudonyms.

*Adam's Challenge Implementing His Learning*

Ironically, to reach his goal of giving his students more opportunity to articulate their ideas, he started to “force” his students to talk, trying to draw out quieter students. In this process, he found himself beginning to listen.

Adam incorporated havruta practices into his own classroom facilitation by questioning his students individually and listening closely to their responses. He tried to bring out different perspectives during text-based classroom discussion, as he had seen us do in the GBMT. Adam reported that specific language prompts that we had introduced, such as asking students, “How did you arrive at that idea?” became an important tool in his own facilitation for keeping students grounded in the subject matter. While Adam had improved in drawing out student ideas and asking more students to participate, he still directed every exchange and was the mediator between the text and every student. His fear of losing control of the class, both in terms of classroom management and in terms of the quality of the learning, held him back from allowing students to explore texts and ideas more independently and to have some control over their own learning process. In his own words, his challenge was fear of “giving up control,” moving himself out of the center of each exchange of ideas. In fact, the first time he planned with us to experiment with putting his students into havruta pairs, he (in his words) “chickened out”, and instead led a large group discussion. Despite his default mode of teaching, and his fears, his experience in the GBMT continued to motivate him to try and create more opportunities for his students to directly engage with the text and share their ideas.

*What Happened in Adam's Classroom*

We worked with Adam to bring havruta learning into his classroom as part of a strategy to support Adam not in losing control of the class, but in planning for shared control. Adam’s experience learning in havruta in the GBMT modeled for him this type of learning, where students did not have to solely rely on the teacher to understand the text but could encounter the text on their own and at the same time, still be supported by the teacher

through various structures [e.g. through the learning set up and the study guide]. By focusing on the rich structural features that havruta work affords (XXX, 2012), Adam was able to make a concrete and visible shift in the roles of teacher, students, and text in his classroom, providing structured support to students while stepping back and giving them room to talk to each other (and not just to him) and develop their own interpretations of the text.

Our work with Adam centered on two areas: the creation of a system that would allow him and his students to retrain for independence, and the thoughtful and thorough design of havruta study guides or tasks<sup>16</sup> that would provide students with the tools to work without their teacher to access meaning both in the text and from one another. Here we provide details from two examples of how this manifested in the classroom.

To fulfill Adam's goal of students taking havruta work seriously without the teacher "being on them all the time," Adam needed to teach them explicitly how to operate independently of him. Toward this end, with our help, Adam adopted a "traffic light system" to enable students to begin to monitor and take responsibility for their own work in havruta. Each havruta would be given a set of three cards- one green, one yellow, and one red. The havruta pair would signal the status of their progress by placing the appropriate card on the table so that both they and Adam could see it. Adam explained to his students: "The green card means that you're OK and have no questions. The [yellow] means that you are having some difficulties but you think you can solve it on your own and if absolutely in dire straits then you lift the red card and I'll come straight by."

Adam noticed and was motivated by a resonant parallel between this card system and the text from Exodus being studied in his classroom: that God remembered Israel after God heard the Israelites cry out. This active call for help, perhaps, was the trigger for God's redemption of the people. Adam drew from this text a parallel lesson that students need to

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<sup>16</sup> These guides instruct students about what to do when studying with their partner and support them to do their work together.

be given the opportunity to try on their own and then initiate getting help through an affirmative act of “crying out”.

Adam tested the traffic light system and reported back some important results. First, when used in the context of a well-defined havruta task, the system enabled students to do good work without the class completely falling apart. Second, Adam saw that he did not lose control of the classroom. And third, students were often able to answer their own questions, instead of running to Adam, and worked together with their partner to understand the meaning of the text.

In one classroom incident, a pair of students put out a red card to ask Adam a question. He approached them and questioned whether it really was a "red card situation." Upon further reflection, the students replaced the red card with a yellow card and figured out their question on their own; Adam was able to walk away and leave them to their work. Adam found this moment significant to changing his teaching practice. In viewing a video of this interaction, Adam's colleague Diane commented to him, “You can see clearly this dance around autonomy and dependence there ... Are you going to be a part of it, are you not, can you leave, can they handle being alone...?”

This system provided a structure through which both students and teacher could re-train themselves: students needed to become aware of why and when they asked for teacher help, and Adam had to hold himself back from frequent intervention or outright facilitation until he was called by a pair with a red card.

Another focus of our work with Adam was the design and redesign of the havruta task, through which teachers distribute their guidance to their students without being physically present or being a direct facilitator for each pair. The havruta task, which consisted of a page of text-based questions introduced by directions and a “framing” for how students should approach the text together, needed to make accessible the meaning of the text while also activating the discussion of ideas between havruta partners.

Adam reports in his mid-year reflection that one of his key learnings from his experience in the GBMT was that “the right questions can promote a higher level of discussion.” Using

question typologies we introduced in the GBMT, Adam sat with us to craft text questions appropriate for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders that would allow students to do a close reading of the text and discover generative ambiguities in the text relating to the nature of redemption (the theme of the text under study).

Adam had the opportunity to teach the same lesson for two different 4th-5th grade groups on two different days, so he was able to test out the havruta task. He found that, despite telling students that the havruta task should not be treated as a “test” with the aim of writing down the “right” answers, the students still engaged with the task and the text as if it were a worksheet to be completed, not really engaging with one another or discussing the text. He then made adjustments to the physical layout of the task; he reformatted the document to a landscape (horizontal) orientation, cut down the number of questions, and had a colleague draw profiles of faces on either end of the sheet to suggest that the text questions were happening inside the discussion of the havruta partnership. The new task design, meant to communicate the nature of the activity and differentiate it from other academic experiences, proved successful.

#### *A New Understanding of the Teacher’s Role*

Through the pd experience, Adam identified and worked on his particular area of growth, learning how to share control, giving students opportunities to engage with each other and directly with the text. As Adam said at the end of our work together, he learned that “my control over them [his students] can be wireless!” “Through the whole process that we did,” Adam reflected, he learned to see the connection between his own study experiences in the GBMT and what he could imagine and implement for his students: “If I could compare the way they [his students] act in havruta, the way... teachers that I know act in havruta, maybe I can act and talk to them [his students] the way I talk to the teachers [his colleagues] and get better results. Which proved quite right.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ray, Gesher’s director, shared his observation of Adam’s growth, which mirrors Adam’s own reflections. He commented that for Adam the havruta pd experience, “definitely had a big impact, but that structure was a struggle. And I think he really did see how structure [of havruta] supports those kind of higher order goals that he does value.”

## DIANE: LEARNING TO OPEN UP INTERPRETIVE SPACE THROUGH HAVRUTA PEDAGOGY

### *Starting Place*

In contrast to Adam's challenge of structuring havruta for enabling a different kind of "control" and learning, Diane's story travels a different a course. Diane, a more experienced teacher than Adam, had taught at Gesher for four years. She had a well-run classroom, in which students were engaged and "shared control" with the teacher, sometimes engaging in small group work around central ideas. Yet, when students read texts together, their reading focused mostly on literal understanding. They were looking to find the "right answer" and move on. They did not readily build off of one another's ideas and did not know how to engage in the kind of wondering together about the text that Diane had enjoyed in the GBMT to open the texts' many interpretations.

### *Motivation for Change and Experience in the GBMT*

In the early months of the GBMT, Diane drew on her experiences in the GBMT to more clearly define her goals for her students and makes small changes to help reach them. Diane reported that she got to experience "a new freedom of approaching text study" through the GBMT, which was focused more on engaging with different ideas than right answers. This emphasis on the interpretive process was both personally meaningful in building ties to her own identity and tradition, and professionally significant as a way of bringing this sense of freedom and play to her students<sup>18</sup>. "It's not so much that I wanted them to reach X conclusion...but I wanted them to join me in this exploration..." She began to articulate as a teaching goal the idea of creating a holding environment for her

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<sup>18</sup> Ray, Gesher's director notes that "[Diane's] a natural structurer, but also has this very passionate commitment to play...[The GBMT] really met needs for her. She really felt this was tying together a lot of her teaching issues... to work on the interaction between those two things [structure and play]."

students to be able to do better interpretive work - what she calls “exploratory space<sup>19</sup>” - which she imagines would enable her students to “make the text their own” and learn to “play with it,” exploring different ideas and viewpoints within the text without premature closure. If this could be a central part of their meaning making process, their learning would be richer, as would their relationship to Jewish tradition and culture. The havruta framework we had taught, which calls for exploration of different ideas and meanings, was an ideal structure to open up this exploratory space.

As the GBMT explored the practices of wondering and of different kinds of questions, Diane experimented with how she structured questions and tasks for her students to enable them to be in this “exploratory space”. Prompted by a homework assignment from the GBMT, she chose to use a question from the GBMT, “Is there another way of understanding that?” as an overarching question in her planning and designed a series of activities that helped students explore the multiple meanings of the biblical phrase “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Diane was encouraged by the fact that the highly scaffolded activities generated for her students new and different understandings of this well known biblical phrase, and began to introduce her students to the hard work and pleasure of the interpretive process. In her midyear reflections, Diane referred to this lesson as a concrete outcome of her learning in the GBMT.

#### *Diane's Challenge Implementing Her Learning*

While Diane worked with her class to help them begin to “play” with and interpret small text excerpts and use other students’ in the classroom as resources to help expand their thinking, she found that often her students still quickly read through texts and came up with superficial understandings of its meaning. They often skipped over many details in the text, simply retelling the plot. She was challenged by how to help her students closely study the words and details of the text and also begin to really interpret it for themselves, exploring alternate understandings of the plot and characters’ motivations.

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<sup>19</sup> This notion is connected to the havruta practice of wondering, which supports learners’ curiosity to ask questions and explore together.

Reflecting on a particular lesson, Diane wrote: "[It was challenging to] offer a structure for them to continue their playful exploration through the text study. Somehow it didn't really 'pass' through. I felt that learners felt the need to rush through questions, didn't enjoy the process of exploration, didn't know quite how to open up themselves and partners to a deeper kind of conversation and engagement with text."

*What Transpires in Diane's Classroom*

Diane created a lesson sequence to help her students move into the "interpretive realm," making this a central learning activity for each student and using havruta as a mechanism to create space for student interpretation and exploration. Diane explained her goals to her students as follows:

Opening up a space is like opening up a window into this text. It's not enough [just] to read as many words as fast as we can, but...to take the time and enjoy and start unfolding different layers that we find in the text...

Diane learned through the GBMT that the components for designing for interpretive space included putting time aside to dwell in the text, gaining facility with the text's plot and characters as the foundation for interpretive work. In this first lesson, Diane held students to a close reading of a long text. In Diane's estimation, it was hard but necessary work that students appreciated in retrospect.

For her second lesson, Diane crafted a havruta study guide with real interpretive questions—that is, questions that have more than one answer and have evidence in the text. These questions were supposed to help students begin to explore the "layers" of the text. Prior to her class, she tested out each question to make sure it "worked." In this second lesson, Diane also took time to ask students to reflect on their havruta experience to help them understand the purpose of such work.

However, by the end of the second lesson, Diane had still not met her goal of moving her students to fully explore the many meanings of the text and get inside its characters. She



reflects that despite not meeting her overall goal "...several important things did happen: students began stretching their ways of thinking, allowing themselves to change perspectives over characters... at the end of the classroom discussion, [they] began touching on the theme of using yourself as an active participant in reading a text."

In her third lesson, Diane crafted a havruta task to help her students "get under the skin of the character." She asked students explicitly to "play" with the text's meanings by doing a role play of the characters. Diane assigned each student a character and put students in havruta to work on interpreting their character through the text and accompanying text-based study questions. Diane also prepared separate guidelines about how to help one's partner develop his/her character using havruta practices such as listening and challenging, drawing on guidelines modeled in the GBMT.

In the final group discussion, Diane supported students to further draw out their characters by asking each student to present themselves in character to the full group. Students presented richly detailed and nuanced readings of their characters and noted how different students played the same characters differently. As students took on their characters in this public performance, some felt moved to respond to each other in character as in this example, continuing their playful exploration of the Jacob and Esau narratives:

Zach [as Isaac speaking to Esau]: I'm sorry I did not bless you. I blessed the wrong person over there.

Diane: You are sorry?

Zach: Yes, I did not like blessing the wrong person.

Diane: So why did you?

Zach: Because I did not know. I'm blind and too dim to see.

Diane: So you had no idea?

Zach: I could only feel the trickster [referring to Jacob].

Diane saw this exchange as an example of her students taking ownership of the interpretive process. She did not have to "pull out ideas from them" but they "took ownership" and were willing to "think creatively and experiment with different ideas."

*Opening up Interpretive Space for Students*

Diane reflected that the havruta structure proved both “helpful” and “protective” in service of her goal of students being able to generate their own interpretations of the text and reach deeper understandings of the characters and their motivations; its explicit roles and directions for partnering helped students “really [clarify] what it is that they’re thinking.” The havruta experience provided “some kind of a protective structure with somebody else there with you, to test your ideas on... not to be coming from a void to the rest of the [class].” The safety of the havruta can help students be uninhibited and therefore playfulness and creativity can emerge.

In a meeting of the GBMT in which Diane shared video clips of a lesson, Diane reported to her colleagues, “I was really happy because I thought that this play area opened up for them, in their own ways, and ... some got further than others. But it wasn’t about me pulling them in; it was more about themselves jumping in and using what they know, and using what they think and that’s really one of my goals...”

**CONCLUSION**

The use of rich conceptual frameworks and support helped the GBMT be impactful both in general and in particular ways with teachers. Generally, teachers made the study of primary Jewish texts more central, used havruta practices to facilitate text based discussions that engaged students and used havruta/partner learning to make positive changes in their classrooms. The two cases help illuminate that each teacher drew on their experiences, as well as ideas and tools from the GBMT and used them in particular ways to meet their specific goals. Adam used the frame of the three havruta partners and the practices of listening and articulating to restructure his classroom from one that was teacher centered to one in which there was shared control so that students could engage with each other and the text directly. Diane used the three havruta partners and havruta practices to hold open space for her students to slow down and help each other wonder about and explore the

text's multiple meanings in order to develop new insights. Significantly, we see through the cases that it was the teachers' experiences as learners in the GBMT- their experiences as havruta learners in which they were asked to put their different voices in relationship with each other and the sacred text and to attend to each other's different ideas -that inspired them and motivated them to identify and stick with goals for change in their classrooms even when it was hard and took ongoing work. The very process of the pd was also the content of the pd and proposed to these teachers a different way of being with one another that provided both inspiration and actual tools for enactment.

The basis for the havruta pedagogy – the havruta unit of two people learning with each other and a text - was a microcosm and building block of the larger teacher learning community which emerged. It provided a relational framework that not only gave the teachers images and tools for teaching in their own classrooms but also established norms for collaboration and practices - such as listening, wondering, challenging and supporting - for learning and working together. In this way, the havruta pedagogy supported the teachers to become a community of practice (Wenger 1998), pursuing the shared enterprise of improving their teaching of Jewish texts and using those very same teaching and learning practices to improve their own text learning and collaborating.

While we cannot generalize from this research, it can point us to consider the different elements that were significant for the professional development of these religious educators and that may be significant in other contexts as well. Situating teachers as both learners and teachers in the pd was very important. As learners, they were inducted into a new way of learning with each other and texts that was both personally meaningful and professionally motivating. As teachers, they were exposed to robust conceptual frameworks and language that helped them unpack their experience as learners and were given tools to enact the experience in their own way for their students. The organizing frame for the pd-havruta learning, text and classroom practice -held together the personal and professional learning components so that teachers were able to make crucial connections between their havruta learning experiences, their classroom practice and the new pedagogy we explored. Helping teachers create their own teacher learning community through which they could

experiment in and reflect on their teaching together provided another important layer of support. Teachers were not expected to make major changes in one fell swoop but were given time to try out new strategies, reflect on what occurred with colleagues and further adapt them accordingly. This cycle of learning, implementation, and reflection was crucial to Adam and Diane making changes that could work for themselves and their students. Finally, this research suggests that the havruta practices have multiple practical uses for teachers. Gesher teachers used them to study texts together and work together in their staff workshops. Adam and Diane also used them as a lens for examining their own and their students' roles in the classroom, as facilitation tools and as skills to teach their students for text study.

This research raises a number of possible implications for classroom religious education interested in fostering student engagement and close reading of text. Gesher teachers had the same learning experiences they were trying to create for their students. They had an opportunity to study in havruta that was designed to induct them into a particular teaching and learning stance in which everyone's ideas mattered, in which direct encounters with each other and the text were valued and in which we as the teachers acted as thoughtful guides.

Adam and Diane placed a premium on these guiding principles, even as their translations into classroom practice had different foci. They both created opportunities for their students to have direct encounters with each other and sacred texts, instead of simply telling them what the texts were about. And they both provided students with the time for these encounters, along with scaffolding. The scaffolding occurred at multiple levels from the sequencing of lessons to the framing of study guide questions and needed to be adapted for different classroom contexts.

Within the GBMT and teachers' classrooms, havruta served powerfully in both a functional/structural role as well as in a metaphorical/spiritual role. Structurally, havruta allowed for providing space within which learners could experiment with interpreting texts with increasing independence. Metaphorically, "havruta" came to symbolize the ideals of

learners taking ownership of their own learning of sacred texts and the value of becoming part of a partnership that allows for deep encounters with the text and one another. As such, “havruta” provided a common language and set of practices for teachers and their students alike to move toward reaching these ideals.

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